

THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA: PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT NATO AND THE
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

by

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Abstract

This paper explores how various socioeconomic measures affect Georgian residents' opinions on joining NATO. These measures include education level, knowledge of the English language, and job satisfaction. Through statistical analysis and the use of a comprehensive regional dataset, it is found that there is a statistically significant relationship between education level, knowledge of the English language, job satisfaction, and support for joining NATO. These findings have a high relevance to current U.S. foreign policy as the majority of U.S. led initiatives have been geared towards enhancing Western support in the Republic of Georgia through English language courses and cross-cultural democracy training.

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2 Introduction

The Republic of Georgia has often played a vital role in major world events, and it would be naive to believe that this country is an unimportant blip on the world map. Understanding the drive and motivation of everyday Georgians is vital to understanding how the future will unfold in the South Caucasus and its surrounding areas, which includes the Middle East, Persia, Russia, and Central Asia. In some regards, the Republic of Georgia and its South Caucasian neighbors are becoming the playing field for old-school cold war tactics. Western nations are seeking to exert influence through NATO and other international organizations, whereas Russia is trying to flex its own muscle through agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

Given the Republic of Georgia's wide regional sphere of influence, it is important that we analyze how Georgians perceive and support Western institutions such as NATO. To explore this idea, this paper examines how socioeconomic and other lifestyle factors affect an individual's support for joining NATO in the Republic of Georgia.

The reasoning behind choosing socioeconomic factors, such as education level, is rooted in the fact that the U.S. currently supports many education-based initiatives in the Republic of Georgia.¹ From a policy standpoint, it is important to know whether these initiatives, such as English as a Second Language and Diplomacy and Democracy programs, are increasing the support of Western organizations in the region.

It is expected that individuals with higher levels of education, knowledge of the English language, job satisfaction ratings, and other positive satisfaction of life indicators will favor

¹George Khelashvili and S Neil MacFarlane. "The Evolution of US Policy towards the Southern Caucasus". In: *International Relations/Uluslararası İlişkiler* 7.26 (2010).

pro-Western policies, such as joining NATO, in the Republic of Georgia. This is based on the assumption that individual's with higher levels of education, English knowledge, and job satisfaction have more access (physically and linguistically) to information on the benefits of joining Western international organizations. The findings of this analysis prove this to be true, and the conclusion is that an individual in the Republic of Georgia is much more likely to support joining NATO if he/she has a higher level of education. However, he/she is only marginally more likely to support joining NATO if he/she has an advanced knowledge of English and is very satisfied in his/her current work.

3 Literature Review

The Republic of Georgia, which today borders Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey, has long been regarded as the birthplace for much of the Quranic and Biblical history. With the Black Sea to the West, Russia to the North, and Armenia and Azerbaijan to the South and South East respectively, this small patch of earth, which is roughly the size of the U.S. state of South Carolina, is home to a culturally and ethnically diverse group of people. These lands have witnessed Mongol hordes, Roman and Russian invasions, and every imaginable type of warfare including ancient, modern, and guerrilla.² The Republic of Georgia has a wide array of topography, ranging from high mountains to low valleys, which have been part and parcel to its relative autonomy and ability to survive coups, invasions, and border disputes.³

Given the rich history of the region, it may be best to quote the famous British general Lionel Dunsterville, who tried to sum up the South Caucasian region in 1918 by saying:

There are so many situations here, that it is difficult to give full appreciation of each. There is the local situation, the all-Persia situation, the Jangali situation, the Persian-Russian situation, the Turkish-advance-on-Tabriz situation, the question of liquidating Russian debts, the Baku situation, the South Caucasus situation, the North Caucasus situation, the Bolshevik situation, and the Russian situation as a whole. And each of these subdivides into smaller and acuter situations for there is no real Caucasian or even North or South Caucasian point of view, there is no unity of thought or action, nothing but mutual jealousy and mistrust. Thus the Georgians of Tiflis regard the problem from a Georgian point

²Thomas De Waal. *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

³U.S. Department of State. *U.S. Department of State - Fact Sheet on US bilateral relations with Georgia*. 2015. URL: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5253.htm>.

of view and play only for their own hand; the Armenians and Tartars in the south, and the Terek and Kuban Coassacks and the Daghestanis in the north, do the same.⁴

Dunsterville’s colorful description still holds true today as the Republic of Georgia hosts a large variety of ethnicities on its land. Figure 1 shows the ethnic makeup of the Republic of Georgia where the large Georgian portion captures a multitude of ethnicities that identify as “Georgian.” Alongside strong ethnic diversity, the Republic of Georgia is also fighting off influence from Russia and learning to deal with the break away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁵ There are also new issues with the Islamic State (Da’esh/IS) recruiting young men from the Pankisi Gorge and Adjara regions of the Republic of Georgia to fight for the new Islamic Caliphate.

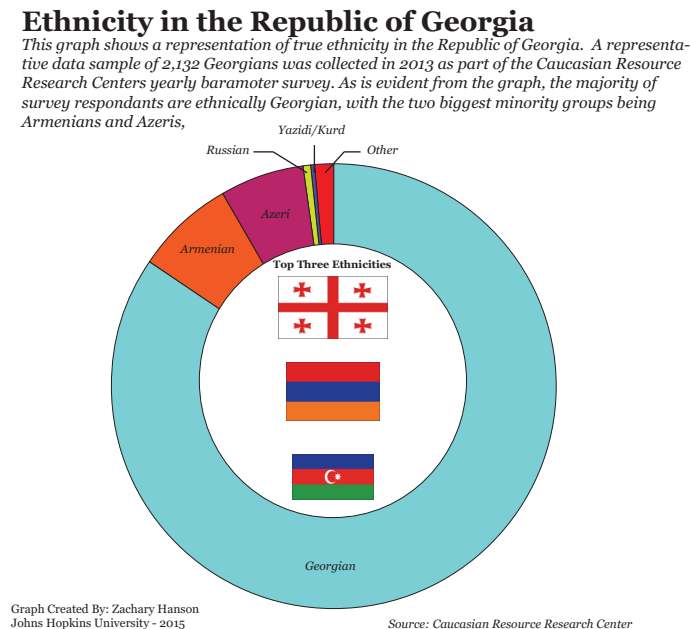


Figure 1: Georgian Ethnic Makeup

⁴Major-General LC Dunsterville. *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*. Andrews UK Limited, 2012.

⁵Ronald Asmus. *A little war that shook the world: Georgia, Russia, and the future of the West*. Macmillan, 2010.

From a Western viewpoint, it is vital that U.S. policy be driven to incorporate the Republic of Georgia into U.S. regional planning for Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The fact that the Republic of Georgia sits between Iran and Russia places it directly in the middle of many pressing political hurdles for the United States.⁶ This means that forming a political/policy strategy for this diverse region is something that needs deeper analysis and understanding.

Historically, the U.S. policy's approach to the Republic of Georgia has been straightforward. U.S. policy has been focused on decreasing Russian influence in the region from the North and containing Iran and the greater Middle East region to the South.⁷ This has been obtained with varying degrees of success by the Republic of Georgia's unwavering support of NATO-allied countries since joining the North Atlantic Cooperation Council after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992. This union with the North Atlantic Cooperation Council encouraged an acceptance of multiple U.S. led education and diplomacy initiatives throughout the Republic of Georgia.⁸

Gaining its independence after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Republic of Georgia has gone from a small support element for NATO to one of the five largest non-member contributors. This has come at the price of supporting missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan, opening training facilities on Georgian land, and the shedding of Georgian blood in support of global NATO missions.⁹ For this support, the Republic of Georgia was awarded with the

⁶Marcel De Haas. "NATO-Russia Relations after the Georgian Conflict". In: *Atlantisch perspectief* 33.7 (2009), pp. 4-9.

⁷Khelashvili and MacFarlane, "The Evolution of US Policy towards the Southern Caucasus".

⁸NATO. *NATO's relations with Georgia*. 2015. URL: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_38988.htm.

⁹Kakha Jibladze. *Georgian-NATO Relations Receive Boost From Brussels*. 2007. URL: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/11369-field-reports-caci-analyst-2007-3-7-art-11369.html>.

verbal commitment that they would become a full-fledged NATO member so long as they meet all of the NATO requirements.¹⁰

This verbal commitment originated at the 2008 Bucharest Summit right before the Russian-Georgian War, and since then the Republic of Georgia has increased its support of the NATO mission.¹¹ Yet, it seems its acceptance into the organization has barely moved forward. This lip-service with no tangible action has had its effect on the greater Georgian public, too.¹² Public support, as reported by the Caucasian Research Resource Center, has been in decline since its peak for support in 2010 (See Figure 2).¹³ This is despite the fact that NATO has been conducting various public programs in the Republic of Georgia to drum up support and to educate citizens on the importance of the NATO mission and the Republic of Georgia's involvement with the organization.

¹⁰Róbert Ondrejcsák. *Perspectives of NATO-Georgia Relations*. 2012.

¹¹NATO. *Bucharest Summit Declaration*. 2012. URL: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

¹²Liz Fuller. *Georgia Nato Relations in Thrall to Previous Miscalculations*. 2015.

¹³Caucasian Research Resource Center. 2015. URL: <http://www.crrccenters.org/2>.

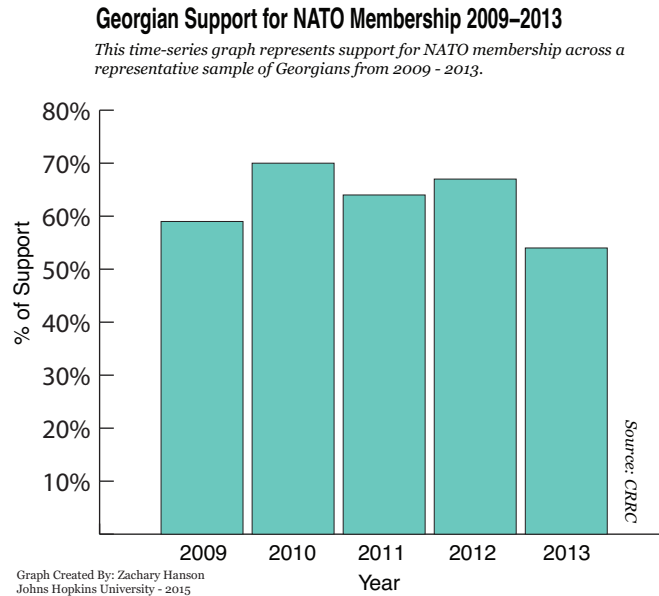


Figure 2: Georgian Support for Joining NATO

The Republic of Georgia has been a key player in the U.S. led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and will continue to be a key ally in the region. The slipping decline in support of joining NATO should be a loud call to action for U.S. foreign policy developers. Not only are Georgians viewing the long road to NATO membership in a less favorable light, but Georgians also favor doing business with Russia just as much as they favor doing business with the U.S. and Europe. In a survey conducted by the Caucasian Research Resource Center in 2013, eighty-two (82) percent of Georgians favored doing business with Russia, whereas eighty-one (81) percent favored doing business with the U.S. and Europe (See Figure 3). This is evidence that current approaches to building a strong “on-the-ground” relationship with individuals in the region may not be working.

GEORGIAN APPROVAL FOR DOING BUSINESS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Recent data from the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRCC) shows that, on average, Georgian citizens approve of doing business with their major trade partners. Approval of doing business with the U.S. and Europe is slightly edged out by approval of doing business with Russia, with approval of business with Iran and Turkey falling behind by about 10 percentage points.

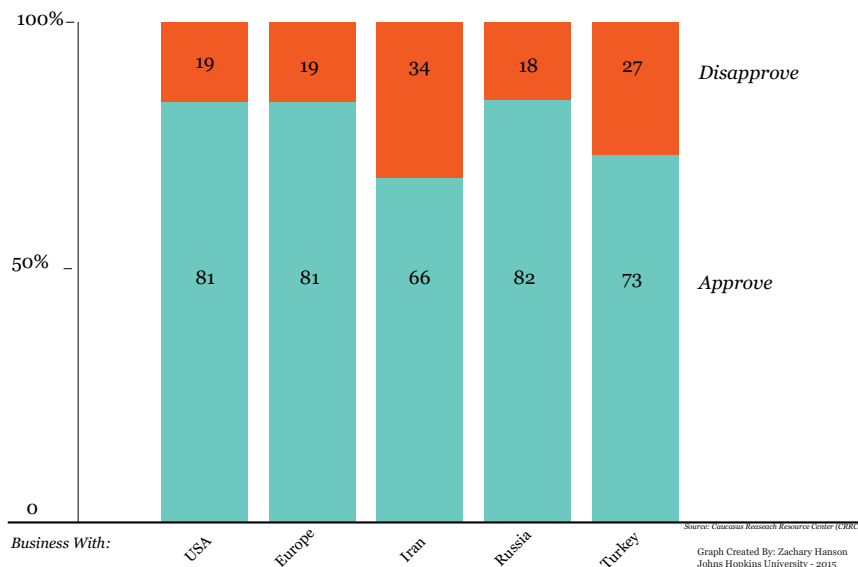


Figure 3: Georgian Support for International Business

The current Georgian government is very clear that it continues to seek full acceptance and assimilation to NATO, and this has been shown as recently as January 2015 with its agreement to continue to send Georgian troops to Afghanistan for the ensuing NATO mission in Afghanistan called “Resolute Support.” Georgia has also recently played host to several large scale NATO military exercises and even inaugurated what is being called the “NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre.”¹⁴ It is without a doubt that the Georgian government, with NATO support, is doing everything possible to fulfill all requirements for acceptance.

Given the importance of the Republic of Georgia’s role in the NATO mission, it is crucial to examine whether the current U.S. foreign policy approach of supporting education-based

¹⁴NATO, *NATO’s relations with Georgia*.

initiatives is working to secure the partnership between both of these countries.¹⁵ Therefore, there is a need to investigate drivers such as higher education levels, knowledge of the English language, job satisfaction, and other measures to see if it is helping to increase public support for joining NATO. These measures were chosen due to the the direct relation to current U.S. policy initiatives that fund cross-cultural education and English as a second language programs. It is vital to ensure that U.S. foreign policy in the region is aligned with what will garner more Western support and not deter citizens from voting for officials who will continue to push for what has been deemed to be an inevitable, though long, acceptance to NATO.

¹⁵Alexander Cooley. "How the West Failed Georgia". In: *Current History* 107.711 (Oct. 2008), pp. 342–344.

4 Data and Methods

Through the use of statistical tools, policy researchers can start to unravel the tightly bound Caucasian knot. In fact, this very desire to understand the ethnic diversity in the region is what drove The Caucasian Research Resource Center to establish a census-type data collection effort that they call the “Caucasian Barometer Survey,” which has been running annually since 2004.¹⁶

This paper employs the most recent iteration of the “Caucasian Barometer Survey” from the Caucasian Research Resource Center from the year 2013, which has over 600 variables, and 2,133 observations where each observation is an individual household member in the Republic of Georgia who is 18 years or older.

In order to evaluate the research question, one dependent variable and three independent variables were identified and then operationalized through a series of simple OLS regression models. Starting with a simple bivariate regression, where Y represents the dependent variable measuring support for joining NATO, X_i represents the main independent variable(s) of years of education, knowledge of the English language, and job satisfaction, respectively. To help curb the potential presence of omitted variable bias, a series of control variables are introduced to the OLS regression model(s).

The main dependent variable is the measure of an individual’s support for the Republic of Georgia joining NATO. It is a likert scale from one to five, with one being “Don’t support at all,” and five being “Fully support.” In the analysis, a number of independent variables are evaluated. First is a continuous variable on a respondent’s education level,

¹⁶*Caucasian Research Resource Center.*

which equals the numbers of years of schooling successfully completed by the respondent. The second independent variable is a likert scale of knowledge of the English language, with one being “No basic knowledge,” two being “Beginner,” three being “Intermediate,” and four being “Advanced.” The last independent variable of evaluation is another likert scale of overall job satisfaction, with one being “Very Dissatisfied,” and five being “Very Satisfied.”

A host of control variables are also deployed, which includes a respondent’s interest in finding a job, the type of work a respondent does, and whether the respondent feels that he/she is fairly compensated. These specific variables were chosen because they directly correlate with our dependent variable. For detail on each variable, please reference Table 1.

Table 1: Variable Descriptions

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
Support NATO?	1 = Don't Support 2 = Rather not Support 3 = Equally Support and Not Support 4 = Rather Support 5 = Fully Support
Knowledge of English	1 = No Basic Knowledge 2 = Beginner 3 = Intermediate 4 = Advanced
Years of Education	Years of Study Completed
Job Satisfaction	1 = Very Dissatisfied 2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied 3 = In the Middle 4 = Somewhat Satisfied 5 = Very Satisfied
Interested in Job?	1 = If Interested in Job 0 if Not Interested in Job
Type of Work	1 = Run My Own Business w/o Employees 2 = Run My Own Business w/ Employees 3 = Employee in Small Local Family Business 4 = Employee in Medium or Big Local Private Org, Company or Enterprise 5 = Employee in State Org, Company, or Enterprise 6 = Employee in Foreign or Intl. Org, Company, Enterprise, or Joint Venture 7 = Employee in Local or Intl. NGO or Non-Profit Org 8 = Other
Fairly Compensated?	1 = Completely disagree 2 = Somewhat Disagree 3 = Somewhat Agree 4 = Completely Agree

5 Results

The output created by running the first regression(s) can be seen in the following table:

Table 2: Effect of Education on Support for NATO

	Model 1	Model 2
Years of Education	.1* (.01)	.06* (.015)
Interested in Job?		.035 (.034)
Type of Work		.005 (.031)
Job Satisfaction		.16* (.07)
Fairly Compensated?		-.12 (.07)
Knowledge of English		.2* (.04)
Constant	1.93* (.19)	2.28* (.28)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$.

When analyzing the regression in Table 2, Model 1, it is clear that the years of education one receives plays a statistically significant role in whether an individual supports joining NATO. What is also apparent in Table 2, Model 1 is that with logical reasoning it is evident that there are many other variables that exist which directly affect the dependent variable. This can be confirmed by checking whether the bivariate regression meets the two conditions to prove omitted variable bias. 1) Are the alternative variables included within the error term? (yes) and 2) Are the alternative variables correlated with the main independent variable? (yes).

Table 2, Model 2 is the solution to the presence of omitted variable bias in Table 2, Model

1. In this model it is observable that the coefficient decreases in size from .1 in the bivariate model to .06 in the multi-variate model, which confirms the expectation of positive bias.

To evaluate the true effect of Table 2, Model 2 an understanding of the dependent variable is needed. The dependent variable is on a likert scale of one to five with one being “Don’t support NATO” and five being “Fully support NATO.” With a baseline constant of 2.28, which falls between the “Rather not support” and “Neutral support” tiers for joining NATO, it is observed that if someone has 20 years of education they jump immediately into the “Rather support” tier while holding the other variables constant.

This is significant because it highlights that going from a high-school education to a university education can move the needle of support for NATO from a neutral stance to one of support.

For the second table, the same techniques are employed to measure the effect of depth of English knowledge on support for NATO:

Table 3: Effect of English Knowledge on Support for NATO

	Model 3	Model 4
Knowledge of English	.31* (.04)	.2* (.04)
Interested in Job?		.035 (.03)
Type of Work		.005 (.03)
Job Satisfaction		.16* (.07)
Fairly Compensated?		-.12 (.07)
Years of Education		.06* (.015)
Constant	2.68* (.08)	2.28* (.28)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$.

All of the same issues that were present in Table 2 are still present in Table 3, Model 3 and Model 4. Similarly, the independent variable of interest is statistically significant, and it is observed that the coefficient decreases in size from .31 in the bivariate model to .2 in the multi-variate model, which again confirms the expectation of positive bias.

However, the real-world effect on our dependent variable is much less significant. For instance, someone with a beginner or intermediate knowledge of the English language will not change “Support of NATO” tiers. Only someone with an advanced knowledge of the English language goes from the baseline constant which is between “Rather not support” and “Neutral support”, to only being slightly above “Neutral support” for joining NATO.

So, although it was statistically significant, the implications of English language knowledge on ones support for joining NATO is almost negligible.

For the last model, the same techniques are again employed but instead measure the effect of one's job satisfaction on support for NATO:

Table 4: Effect of Job Satisfaction on Support for NATO

	Model 5	Model 6
Job Satisfaction	.05* (.008)	.16* (.07)
Interested in Job?		.035 (.034)
Type of Work		.005 (.03)
Fairly Compensated?		-.12 (.07)
Knowledge of English		.2* (.04)
Years of Education		.06* (.015)
Constant	3.29* (.05)	2.28* (.28)

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$.

Once again, the same standards as before hold true for the last independent variable of interest. However, when evaluating Table 4, Model 6 it is evident that the coefficient goes from .05 to .16, meaning that before introducing the control variables, the coefficient was too far to the left on a number line indicating a negative bias. Also, similar to the English language variable, the real world effect of one's job satisfaction on support for joining NATO is quite small.

Being “Very dissatisfied” all the way to being “Somewhat satisfied” does not move an individual into a new tier of support for NATO. In fact, only those who are “Very satisfied” in their work move into the tier of neutral support for joining NATO. This shows that job satisfaction only plays a small role in moving the needle on an individual’s support for joining NATO.

6 Conclusions

Analyzing the drivers that have shaped U.S. foreign policy towards the Republic of Georgia is an important self-audit to ensure that both countries' goals continue to align. Historically, the U.S. approach to the region has been to support educational and diplomacy initiatives, as well as support the government in its attempt to join NATO. Measuring whether or not these U.S. led initiatives have any affect on public support for joining NATO is the target of this paper.

This analysis shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between a Georgian's education level, knowledge of English, and job satisfaction on his/her support for joining NATO. However, the only independent variable of interest that has a substantive effect is the number of years of education that an individual Georgian possesses.

More specifically, it is highlighted that going from a high-school education to a college education significantly affects an individual's support level for their country joining NATO. Therefore, increasing educational aid that specifically targets high-schoolers who may or may not attend college is important.

Another important finding is that knowledge of the English language and job satisfaction are less impactful on one's support for joining NATO than previously expected. Currently, the U.S. and the Republic of Georgia deploy hundreds of U.S. English as a Second Language instructors throughout the country. This investment should possibly be re-evaluated (though it may be tangentially related to the ability to obtain a four year college degree) as it has minimal impact on whether the public supports joining NATO. It may also be relevant to not pursue any large-scale joint initiatives to increase job satisfaction and retention, at least

from the viewpoint of garnering support for joining NATO.

Though the analysis highlights the importance of education levels on general support for joining NATO, it is important to note that this research was limited in several areas. Mainly, the research was tied by time constraints, limited data on the region, and the inability of the researchers to identify strong instrumental variables that met both the relevance and exogeneity requirements. If researchers had access to more historical datasets, it would be easier to identify trends that may help predict how the Republic of Georgia will evolve democratically.

For other researchers moving forward with this topic, it is encouraged to dive deeper into finding a solution to the omitted variable bias that is present in these causal relationships. To do this, it is suggested to identify and implement instrumental variables. It is also suggested that researchers look at historical versions of this data set and compare outputs from before and after the 2008 Georgian - Russian War. Researchers could then utilize Difference-in-Differences, as it may be beneficial to see how individual Georgian's support for joining NATO was specifically affected by the Russian invasion of the Republic of Georgia.

Overall, the evaluation of these relationships is directly beneficial to the U.S. foreign policy making world as it helps to parse out which of the current policy initiatives are, and are not, working in the region. It may also help to identify some potential new initiatives that may be more beneficial to U.S. and Georgian interests and goals.

For the U.S., it is important that it continues to support the Republic of Georgia in its continued efforts to join NATO to ensure the U.S. has a strong ally in such a key geographic area.

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7 Curriculum Vitae

Zachary Hanson, born in January of 1989 in Lawrenceville, Georgia USA, is a Resiliency Services Management Consultant within IBM's Global Technology Services, where his work focuses on building business continuity for several Fortune 500 companies. Outside of work, Zach's interests revolve around international security and foreign policy development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. His interest in the region was cultivated during his undergraduate studies where he spent time in Russia as both a student and a U.S. Department of State Critical Languages Scholar. After graduating, Zach worked for an NGO in Kyrgyzstan, the OSCE in Vienna, and taught English in the Republic of Georgia.